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ABSTRACT

This action research project sought to enhance parent, student, and teacher relationships and maximize academic time in the elementary school setting by implementing looping, the practice of teachers progressing with the same students through two or more grades. The targeted population consisted of second graders in a middle-class, blue-collar community in Iowa. The problem of lost academic time at the beginning of the school year to build relationships and establish rules and routines was documented at the local, state, and national levels. The looping intervention allowed first graders and their teacher to progress together to second grade (after which, the teacher began with a new class of first graders). The results of the implementation of looping were positive. Student test scores from the end of the first year to the middle of the second year were higher in the looping class than the non-looping class. Parent, student, and teacher comments indicated that the looping process was beneficial to everyone. (Two appendices include project documents. Contains 16 references.) (EV)

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ENHANCING RELATIONSHIPS AND IMPROVING ACADEMICS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTING BY IMPLEMENTING LOOPING

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of
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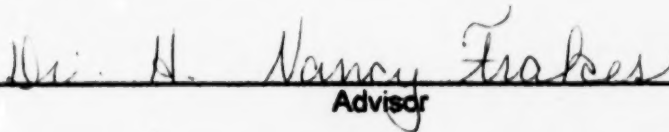
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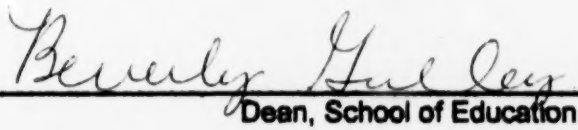
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Abstract

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Title: Enhancing Relationships and Improving Academics in the Elementary School Setting by Implementing Looping

This report described a program for implementing looping in the elementary school setting to enhance parent, student, and teacher relationships as well as to maximize academic time. The targeted population consisted of second grade students in a middle class, blue collar community located in Eastern Iowa. The problem of lost academic time at the beginning of the school year to build relationships and establish rules and routines was documented at the local, state, and national level.

Analysis of probable causes revealed that students with an unstable home life lacked trust in the school setting and academic achievement suffered as a result of broken relationships. Faculty reported that students experienced broken relationships at the end of each school year, lack of parental trust in the school system, and amount of special needs students in the targeted population were all contributing to the loss of academic time.

A review of the solution strategies resulted in the implementation of looping. The first grade students and their teacher progressed together to second grade.

The results of the implementation of looping were positive. Student test scores from the end of the first year to the middle of the second year were higher from the looping class than the non-looping class. Parent,s student, and teacher comments concluded that the looping process was beneficial for all who were involved.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

At the end of the school year, teachers send their students on to the next grade level and new teachers. Each year there is a transition period while teachers are developing relationships and setting expectations which result in lost academic time. The students' academic progress is delayed while relationships are formed. There is a loss of academic time at the beginning of each school year while teachers get to know their students. Evidence for the existence of the problem included surveys, observations, anecdotal records, and student interviews.

Immediate Problem Context

The targeted elementary school housed 314 students in kindergarten through grade 5. The school population was made up of 95% Caucasian students and 5% minority students. Thirty-five percent of these students came from single parent families. Families that qualified for free and reduced cost lunches made up 43% of the school population. Attendance was not a problem at this school and many students had perfect attendance.

The school staff was made up of 24 certified teachers and one administrator. Of these teachers, 25% had one to five years of teaching experience, 17% had six to 10 years experience, 4% had 11 to 15 years experience, 29% had 16 to 20 years

experience, and 25% had more than 20 years of teaching experience. Twenty-nine percent of the certified staff members had earned advanced degrees. The support staff was made up of 23 non-certified people including teacher assistants, secretaries, custodians, and cooks.

The school had many special education programs which serviced 14% of the school's population. Students from around the district that qualified for these specific programs were bused into the neighborhood school. The hearing impaired and autism programs were located in a small building adjacent to the main building. They were served by one specialized teacher and several assistants. Students in these programs were integrated into the regular education classrooms when appropriate. The school was home to two classrooms for children with moderate disabilities. These students were integrated into the regular education classrooms as much as possible. Students with learning disabilities received special help from a resource teacher who was available for three hours each day. Some of the students receiving these services were pulled out of the classroom, while others received the help needed in the context of the regular education classroom. The Area Education Agency provided speech and occupational therapy services at the school for students who qualified. The district Talented and Gifted program was not located at this school, but students involved in the program were bused to a different elementary school in the district for a half day each week. A guidance counselor was assigned to the building half time and taught classroom lessons every other week. The guidance counselor also worked with students individually and in small groups. This building did not qualify for Title I funding and therefore did not offer support to students struggling with math and reading. A reading specialist was available half days to work with small groups of kindergarten and first grade students on reading skills.

Many extra-curricular activities were offered to students. Pupils had the

opportunity to participate in band, orchestra, Drug Abuse Resistance Education, peer relationship groups, sign language classes, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, rocket club, and peer tutoring.

Teachers in the building had the opportunity to be involved in the Parent Teacher Association, Teacher Assistance Team, School Improvement Team, Student Assistance Team, Principal's Advisory Committee, Peer Coaching, and other school and district committees.

Teaching strategies used in this school were based on recent research about brain compatible classrooms and the way students learn. The curriculum was delivered through integrated thematic units in which cooperative learning and authentic assessment were vital elements. The school implemented an all day, every day kindergarten program which followed a constructivist and developmentally appropriate curriculum. The first through fifth grades built upon this foundation by implementing developmentally appropriate practices and hands-on learning activities at respective levels. This school was a model for other schools in the district in the practice of using portfolio assessment and student-led conferences.

The school climate was that of a family atmosphere. The staff worked collaboratively with grade level partners as well as across grade levels. The principal fostered this climate by allowing teachers to help in the management of the school, supporting new and innovative ideas, and interacting daily at all levels with students, teachers, and parents.

Surrounding Community

The targeted school was located in a district with two high schools grade 9 through 12. One was a traditional high school with 1,337 students. The other was an alternative high school with 117 students. Two middle schools, grade 6 through 8, had an average enrollment of 522 students. There were seven elementary schools

kindergarten through grade 5 with a total enrollment of 2,230 students. There were 378 certified staff members and 345 non-certified staff members employed in the district.

At the time of the action research project, the district was in a state of transition. Elementary schools were being renovated and consolidated. Numerous district programs were being rearranged to ease financial problems. The district was facing declining enrollment and was trying to be proactive in solving problems. School boundaries were changed and teachers had to take on increased responsibilities. Change did not come easily in this blue collar community in which many of the residents were retired factory workers who relished the good old days. The first bond referendum in twenty years had recently been passed by a narrow margin after several tries. A sales tax option to fund school infrastructure was not supported by a majority of the community which in turn required the school system to find other ways to finance the many school repairs and building updates.

The school district was located in a river community with a population of 30,000 people. The major employers were manufacturing companies of which there were 48 facilities. Twenty percent of the population was employed by these industries. Other major employers were retail stores, hospitals, schools, and a riverboat casino. The unemployment rate in this community was 3.5%.

The community's Chamber of Commerce was struggling to keep retail businesses in the downtown area. There were several empty stores downtown, while new businesses were being established on the outskirts of town. The tourism bureau worked to attract visitors to the riverfront and the casino. These organizations were usually supportive of the community schools.

Families in the community may choose to have their children attend the public schools or parochial schools. Several students from other communities elected to

attend the public schools in this community because of the varied opportunities and programs available to them in this district.

National Context of the Problem

The problem of severing important student, teacher, and parent relationships at the end of a school year and having to start from the beginning each year had generated concern at the state and national levels. "As adults we value long-term relationships built on trust. We should allow kids to do the same" (Grant, 1998, p. 21).

Student success is partially determined by the knowledge and understanding the teacher has of student learning styles, academic strengths and weaknesses, and personality traits (Lincoln, 1997). After spending nine months learning together, the parents, students, and teacher become a team. The expectations are well known and are supported in both the home and school setting. Clear expectations provide the students with the consistency which many of them need.

For many children, the teacher is the most stable adult in their lives. This is a very strong and important relationship in the development of a young child. When the relationship between students, teacher, and parents is severed at the completion of each school year, a strong relationship built on trust is not allowed to develop to its full potential. This can result in a loss of academic time at the beginning of each school year. Teachers must spend a great deal of time building the foundations of a strong relationship with students, and learning about student ability levels, personal interests, and individual learning styles in order to facilitate more effective instruction (Gaustad, 1998).

Students need meaningful, continuous relationships with a positive authority figure. Too many poor students lack those relationships at home and their school experiences also offer them little stability (Carol, 1998). Children that live in poor, urban areas need more time with one teacher to counteract the instability that often

infects their homes and schools (Carol, 1998).

Another problem resulting from the severing of relationships at the end of the school year relates to the special education referral process. Because this process often takes the entire school year or longer to complete, students may be overlooked if the process is not completed at the end of the traditional school year. The next year's teacher may need to start the entire process over resulting in the loss of academic support that the student may need. The change in teachers may delay the progress of the student.

Severing relationships between parents, teachers, and students at the end of the school year presents many problems. These problems are drawing concern from professionals at the national and state levels. Many are considering different solutions to maintain these strong and vital relationships beyond the traditional school year. Students, teachers, and parents will all benefit when this problem is recognized and addressed.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

At the end of the school year, teachers send their students on to the next grade level and new teachers. Each year there is a transition period, while teachers are developing relationships and setting expectations, which results in lost academic time. The students' academic progress is delayed while relationships are formed.

In order to document the lost academic time, anecdotal records consisting of time spent on establishing routines and forging relationships were noted over a period of two weeks. Four teachers, chosen randomly, were involved in recording the amount of time spent on academics in the classroom the first two weeks of school, compared to the amount of time spent on rules, routines, and relationships. A summary of the data collected is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Hours spent over a two week period

Teacher	Time Spent on Academics	Time Spent on rules, routines, and relationships
A	53 Hours	.5 Hours
B	44 Hours	9 Hours
C	47 Hours	7 Hours
D	44 Hours	10 Hours

Of the 3,200 minutes spent in the classroom during the first two weeks of school, an average of 390 minutes were spent on developing rules, routines, and relationships. Teacher A noted that fewer minutes were spent developing rules, routines, and relationships. This teacher was spending her second year with the same students and therefore the routines, rules, and relationships were already established and needed only limited review.

Teacher surveys were used to determine how much time teachers needed to feel comfortable with individual students learning abilities and styles. These surveys concluded that most teachers need approximately three months to become knowledgeable enough about each individual student to accommodate specific learning needs.

Student interviews and parent questionnaires were also used. They showed that parents and students felt comfortable with the teacher's expectations and teaching style after the first conference in November.

Probable Causes

The targeted school was set up so that students had a different teacher for each grade level. The students had to forge new relationships at the beginning of each school year. Due to the lack of knowledge about a new teacher at the beginning of the year, students expressed anxiety on the first day of school. In journals, students wrote about fears of being accepted in their new classroom environment by both peers and teachers.

The parents in the targeted school district displayed a lack of trust toward the school system. This was due, in part, to financial problems the district encountered after going over budget on two new elementary schools. Parents felt many changes were being made without the best interests of the students in mind. School boundaries were changed yearly, and students were being bussed throughout the community.

School personnel were transferred involuntarily into positions in which they had no expertise. Grade level sections were being cut and class sizes were growing. These problems factored into the anxiety parents and students felt at the beginning of the new school year.

Teacher surveys revealed that teachers needed a considerable amount of time to become comfortable with individual learning needs of students because of the large number of students in the classrooms, and because many of their students were identified as special education integrated into the regular education classroom. These factors made it difficult for teachers to establish routines early in the year that worked for all students because of the varied needs.

Many students in the targeted school came from single parent families, foster families, or were living with extended family members. These students have a difficult time forming trusting relationships with others which can make the beginning of a new school year traumatic. Newberg (1995) states that students in these situations often live fragmented lives with no continuity. He felt that schools can be a safety net for these students once a quality relationship is built with the teacher. When teachers pay close attention to students' development, they are better able to positively affect the students. Transient students who are constantly moved from one setting to another often lack stability in their home lives. Children benefit from the stability of being with the same adult and peers, and the stability promotes a better relationship between teachers and parents (USA Today, 1996).

Students with academic difficulties regress at the beginning of a school year because they have trouble with transitions to new classrooms, different teachers, peers, routines, and expectations. Academic achievement suffers during this time of change (Newberg, 1995). At the beginning of the new school year, teachers report in surveys that the majority of the focus is on setting routines and expectations.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Looping is a process where students stay with the same class and teacher for at least two consecutive grade levels. This practice dates back to the times of the one-room schoolhouse (Terry, 1997). Looping is not multi-age grouping. Rather, it is students of the same age and grade level progressing together with their teacher through more than one grade. Other terms synonymous with looping are multi-year grouping, persistence teams, twenty-month classroom, multi-year teaching, two-cycle teaching, and class continuance.

Japanese teachers keep students for two years or more and say that the first year is for getting to know the students and the second year is for teaching (Wynne and Walberg, 1994). Because teachers and students spend multiple years together, the strong relationship they establish is one of the major benefits to looping. Many students come from unstable home lives and relationships at school can provide much needed continuity to their lives. By having the same teacher and peer group for more than one school year, a student is less stressed, more comfortable with the teacher's expectations, and feels a greater sense of confidence. The student is therefore more likely to take risks in the classroom environment. The classroom community becomes like a family for students and teacher.

Given today's less than traditional family situations, a multi-year model is a way to provide stability in the often unstable lives of students (Lincoln, 1997).

Because many parents work two jobs or are single parents, students need to feel a bond with one another. It takes the entire first year to build a level of trust. By staying with a teacher that knows them and whom they trust, students are given time and more instruction which allows them to succeed (Rasmussen, 1998). For children from broken homes, teachers become significant people in students' lives, giving them a greater sense of security (Vann, 1997). The teacher is a person the students can count on because of the routines they have developed together. When the students come to school each day, they know what to expect. The routines and the people stay the same, allowing the students more freedom in their learning, because they are not worried about unexpected events. This consistent stable environment is much different from what many students may experience outside of school.

The continuity in a looping classroom leads to many benefits for the students. They may enjoy school more, have fewer discipline problems, have better attendance, have higher academic achievement, and be referred to special education programs less frequently (Forsten, Grant, Johnson, Richardson, 1997). The teacher in a looping classroom knows the students well and can better plan lessons to meet the individual needs of each student. If a student struggles, the teacher has more time to try interventions within the regular classroom and to observe the child rather than referring the child immediately for special education testing. The extended period of time spent together in the looping classroom encourages higher academic achievement because students are comfortable with the teacher and the classroom expectations and can therefore concentrate on learning.

Terry (1997) states that looping is a developmentally appropriate practice. Because teachers are with the same students for more than one school year, they are

more aware of the students' abilities and are then more able to provide developmentally appropriate learning situations. Looping allows the teacher to address topics when students are developmentally ready for them. For teachers not involved in the looping process, a great deal of time at the beginning of the school year is spent on assessing each student's individual learning abilities and developmental levels. When teachers and students interact for more than one year, teachers are more knowledgeable of the students' preferred learning styles, behavior patterns, interests, social skills, and emotional needs. Such knowledge allows them to plan developmentally appropriate activities for the classroom (Zahorik and Dichanz, 1994). Multi-year teachers are able to begin the second year with a firm knowledge of the students' academic and developmental levels and can thus plan appropriately. Time is spent more efficiently by students and teachers in a looping classroom because time is not wasted on assessment at the beginning of the second year. Looping also helps to eliminate ideas of promotion and retention because the program is designed to meet the needs of the individual student rather than expecting the child to change to meet the program (Terry, 1997).

In a looping classroom, teachers are able to cover more material and offer more hands-on activities to students because they are knowledgeable about the students' behavior patterns and learning styles. Many teacher don't use hands-on activities with their students until they are certain that the students understand expectations and classroom rules. When students spend multiple years with a teacher, the expectations and rules are very well understood and the teacher may be more inclined to allow the children more freedom in their learning activities. Teachers who have a thorough knowledge of their students are better able to engage them in formal learning situations because they can use the knowledge about the students in every facet of educational decision making (Williams and Wood, 1997).

Parents benefit from looping in a variety of ways. Because parents and teachers have few meetings during the school year, there is little time for them to get to know each other and the other's expectations or needs. Some parents may not feel comfortable in school settings. Because these parents are more reserved, looping helps them communicate on a deeper level. Teachers and parents can then work closely together (Rasmussen, 1998). In a looping classroom, teachers and parents are given more time to become comfortable communicating. Both parties feel less threatened by the other and can work more closely together to benefit the students. There is increased parental involvement because parents feel more comfortable with the teacher after spending the first year building a relationship (Rasmussen, 1998, p.4). Parents are more likely to volunteer in the classroom if they are comfortable with the teacher and do not feel threatened. Looping fosters strong relationships between the parent and teacher and will therefore encourage more parent involvement in the school.

The potential for building stronger school-home partnerships is greater with looping. Rather than having to establish communication with families each year, teachers need only reconnect and move forward in the second year and beyond (Lincoln, 1997). Because teachers and parents can work closely together, problem solving and prevention become priorities. The students are the main priority and better communication between parents and teachers can take place because they have a long term relationship. Fostering a good relationship between parents and teacher benefits the child because the parents are comfortable with the teacher, the teacher learns how to help parents, and parents learn how to help the teacher (Rasmussen, 1998). This kind of relationship between families and the school can only benefit the academic achievement of the student. The main priority of all parties involved is the education of the students and a strong partnership between home and school benefits

all involved.

The school benefits from looping classrooms because there is more communication going on between parents and faculty. The teacher becomes the school's closest link to the home (Barnes, 1991). This strong relationship helps all involved work things through rather than pushing the problem off to someone else to solve. The school becomes a more efficient place.

Teachers like to loop because it gives them first hand knowledge of the scope and sequence of the curriculum. Because they are teaching at least two consecutive grade levels, they are better able to see where kids are headed and what the long range goals for the students are. This helps teachers to plan more effective lessons because they are more focused on the objectives. Having two years to cover content and skills gives teachers the option for more flexibility and creativity in delivery of the curriculum. Teachers also like looping because the classroom feeling of community developed is very rewarding. Preparing new materials and covering different content each year guarantees teachers against going stale. It is exciting to do something different as opposed to covering the same content year after year. Teachers feel they are able to better plan for the second year because of the knowledge they have gained during the first year about the individual students, and because they know what background information the students learned in the previous year (Elkind, 1987). It is easier to plan lessons when the teacher knows what was taught and how it was approached the year before.

The summer months between the two consecutive years in a looping classroom can be used as a learning experience. Teachers may give special assignments for the students to complete over the summer. Summer scavenger hunts, journal writing, and other enjoyable activities help keep the students thinking over the summer months.

Some concerns have arisen in regard to the implementation of looping. Terry

(1997) states that social developments may be stunted because of the limited interactions between students and that students may have a more difficult transition when they have to leave the classroom at the end of the final year of the loop. These transitions may be more difficult because the students are used to the peer group and the teacher they have been with. These concerns can become non-issues if they are addressed and handled appropriately. The looping teacher can prepare the students for the transition and work to make it easier for them. If students know what to expect, some of their anxieties will be relieved. Another concern with looping is that the students are exposed to fewer points of view, fewer teaching styles, and areas of expertise because of being limited to one teacher for more than one year (Lincoln, 1997). This is a valid concern as teachers usually do have curriculum areas they are stronger in than others. The problem is easily resolved when the teacher is aware of the area of weakness and is open to help and ideas from other teachers. Teachers in a looping classroom, like all other teachers, should not think they can offer everything to every student. When teachers collaborate and share ideas, everyone benefits. Sharing with other teachers would be a solution to the problem of offering a limited point of view to students.

The implementation of looping is fairly uncomplicated. The first step in implementation is to decide as a school what kind of looping configuration will work for the school population. Some possible configurations would be two-year looping, three-year looping, and inter-building looping where a teacher from an exit grade of one school follows the students to the next grade level at a different school. It must be decided if the entire school will loop or just a few teachers or grade levels. Teachers should not be forced to loop, because looping would not be as effective.

Once the looping configuration is decided upon, parents must be informed of the looping process. A good foundation for communication can be built in this step.

Sharing information with parents and inviting them into the classroom will start the communication at the beginning of the school year.

Teachers will need to communicate with each other about the curriculum in both grade levels to be taught. It is important to keep accurate records of what objectives have been covered each year so as not to overlap too much during the second year. It is also important to keep a record of the objectives each student mastered or did not master during each year so the teacher can go over it again before the looping situation ends.

At the completion of the first year in a looping classroom, the parents need to be given an option to move their student from the looping classroom. If there are personality conflicts between the students, parents, or teachers, the parents need to have the option to remove the child from the class. It is important to survey teachers and parents at the completion of the looping years to evaluate its effectiveness. The only other implementation step will be ongoing discussion between teachers when teaching a curriculum at a grade level that is new to them.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of looping during the period of September 1999 through March 2000, the second grade students from the targeted class will show increased academic growth, strengthen previously built relationships with their teacher, and build stronger home to school connections as measured by Curriculum Based Monitoring of reading fluency, teacher observation, standardized tests, parent contacts, and student surveys.

In order to achieve the objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Thematic units that follow the new curriculum will be developed and implemented.
2. Learning centers to enrich the thematic units will be created.
3. Communication with other teachers that loop and teach second grade will take place through the year.

Project Action Plan

- I. Things to be done before implementing looping
 - A. Review articles, books, and videos about looping
 - B. Talk with and interview teachers that currently loop
 - C. Contact parents to inform them about looping
 - D. Transfer teaching materials to new classroom
 - E. Develop thematic units to follow new curriculum
 - 1. Learning centers to fit new themes
 - 2. Lesson plans
 - F. Develop data collection instruments
 - 1. Student interview questions
 - 2. Parent questionnaires
 - 3. Teacher surveys
 - 4. Interview questions for teachers that currently loop
 - 5. Teacher observation checklist
 - G. Conduct interviews with teachers who have looped
- II. Things to do during the looping process
 - A. Week 1
 - 1. Conduct student interviews
 - 2. Inform staff about looping process
 - 3. Send home parent volunteer sheets
 - 4. Fill out teacher observation sheet for ten days
 - B. Weeks 2 -3
 - 1. Record observations weekly in implementation journal
 - 2. Collect teacher observation checklists and compare
 - C. Weeks 4 - 24

1. Conduct Curriculum Based Monitoring fluency measurements as a baseline
2. Conduct Gates McGinitie Reading Test and compare results with other second grades in the district (use a pretest)
3. Send home parent questionnaires
4. Teach curriculum using integrated thematic units

III. Things to do after looping process

- A. Give Curriculum Based Monitoring fluency measurements again to see growth
- B. Conduct Gates McGinitie Reading Test again to show growth
- C. Prepare students for separation at the end of the year
 1. Group activities with other second graders
 2. Orientation sessions with the third grade teachers

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of looping, parents, students, and teachers will be surveyed and interviewed in regard to the benefits and disadvantages of looping. These interviews and surveys should show that the relationships formed due to looping positively effected the academic and social achievement of the students.

Standardized tests given to the second graders will be compared to students in a non-looping classroom to see if the academic growth is greater in the students that were part of the looping classroom. Comparisons of time spent at the beginning of the school year on rules and procedures will be made with other teachers that did not loop. The first few weeks of school will be a critical time to collect this information as it will show the most discrepancy in time spent on routines.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was for students to show increased academic growth, strengthen previously built relationships with the teacher, and for teachers and parents to build stronger home to school connections. The implementation of looping, the process of a teacher and students staying together for two consecutive years, was selected to effect the desired changes.

At the end of the school year the teacher of the targeted first grade classroom was given the opportunity to move to second grade. It was decided that the teacher and students would move together to the next grade level. It was necessary for two of the students to be moved from the looping classroom to eliminate some behavior concerns. Because of this there were also two new students moved into the looping classroom. Although the students were officially notified at registration about the plan for looping, many of them knew early in the summer. The teacher received phone calls from parents during the summer to confirm the rumors and express their excitement. Throughout the summer the teacher prepared for a new grade level by studying curriculum guides and visiting with second grade teachers. The teacher also had to change classrooms.

The first day of school brought smiling and relaxed faces. The students seemed

comfortable and confident in starting the new school year. The teacher also felt comfortable seeing the familiar faces and was ready for the continuation of previous year. The year was started with the desks arranged in cooperative learning groups and their first cooperative activity happened the first day of school. The students were asked to put a puzzle together in their groups without communicating with using words. The students were comfortable with the other children and worked well cooperatively.

During the first week of the looping process, the teacher noted that behavior problems were at a minimum and there was a great amount of time spent on academics. This was due to students already knowing the daily routines and the expectations of the teacher. Although the students were having an easy transition, the teacher was feeling overwhelmed with learning the second grade curriculum. Much time was put into planning daily lessons and organizing resources. A great deal of planning time was spent meeting with the other second grade teacher.

A parent letter was sent home at Back to School Night to inform the parents of the looping process. A sample of the letter can be found in Appendix A. Parents also had the opportunity to fill out a volunteer sign-up sheet that evening. A sample of this can be found in Appendix B. A parent that was very timid and withdrawn when her child was in first grade volunteered to help with center time one hour each week during her child's second grade year. Throughout the first few weeks of school many parents stopped by school to hear more about looping. They expressed their excitement in having the same teacher for two years.

By the second day of school, the teacher knew which students needed academic support from the Title I teacher and the Math and Reading Strategist. When these teachers were in the regular classroom for support, the regular education teacher was able to readily identify students that needed extra attention.

To track the academic progress of the students in the looping classroom, the students in both second grade classrooms were given the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Assessment in October and April of first and second grade. Reading fluency probes were given to both groups in October, January, and April of first and second grade. Parents were given questionnaires and students were interviewed regarding their feelings about the looping process. At the conclusion of the second grade year, students wrote in journals about the positives and negatives of looping.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of looping on student academic growth, Curriculum Based Monitoring reading fluency probes were used each trimester. Students were given three passages to read. They were given one minute for each passage and the number of words read correctly was recorded. The same three passages were read each trimester at the specific grade level. Results were compared with those from the non-looping classroom. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Curriculum Based Monitoring Reading Fluency Probes by Trimester

<u>Classroom</u>	<u>Spring/1st grade</u>	<u>Fall/2nd grade</u>	<u>Winter/2nd grade</u>
Looping	range 101-19 median 50	range 129-23 median 64	range 135-39 median 87
Non-Looping	range 103-15 median 47	range 125-17 median 49	range 167-22 median 64.5

The intervention appeared to have had a positive effect on the reading fluency of the students. At the end of first grade both of the classrooms were similar in reading fluency. An average growth of fourteen words per minute was seen by the students in the looping classroom at the beginning of the year, as compared to two words per

minute by the non-looping classroom. As the year progressed, the students in both of the classrooms showed continued growth, but the students from the looping classroom read more words per minute overall.

Another form of assessment used to show academic growth was the Gates-MacGinitie Standardized Reading Test. This test was given in the spring of the first grade year and again in the fall of second grade. A different form of the test is given for each of the grade levels. The Gates-MacGinitie test measures reading comprehension as well as word decoding. Results of the Gates-MacGinitie test are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test as measured by Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE)

Classroom	Spring / 1st grade	Fall / 2nd grade
Looping	median 32 range 61-20	median 49 range 76-31
Non-Looping	median 29.5 range 65-8	median 37 range 81-22

The Gates-MacGinitie test shows that the intervention had a positive effect on the students' reading scores. Table 2 shows greater growth in the looping classroom. The median of the looping class went from 32-49, whereas the median from the non-looping class went from 29.5-37. Both classrooms ended the first year with a score of 2.5 NCE of each other. By October of the second year the difference between NCE scores was 12.

Teacher reactions were documented in a weekly journal kept throughout the year. The teacher recorded many positive aspects of looping. The students appeared to be very relaxed and confident on the first day of school. The morning routine was familiar and their comfort level helped the transition to the new school year. The

teacher noted behavior problems were at a minimum, even for students who had problems the previous year. From the first day of school, academics, not expectations and routines, were the focus. The teacher felt the students showed strong social relations with each other and felt it was as though they had just had a holiday vacation, not an entire summer off. Cooperative learning had been implemented during first grade and the teacher felt students picked up right where they left off with their ability to work in cooperative groups.

The teacher did note some negative aspects to looping. One of the autistic students showed some behavior problems that were not seen the previous year. It was felt that the student may have been too comfortable with the routine and needed a change. The student was not removed from the classroom however, and throughout the year the behaviors improved. The teacher expressed frustration with the extra work involved in teaching a new grade level. More time was needed for lesson planning as well as developing centers and integrated theme units. Grade level teaming was a vital part of the looping process for the teacher and the common planning time during the school day was essential.

Reactions of parents and students to the looping process were the final way of evaluating the intervention. Parents had many positive things to say about looping. They mentioned feelings of security felt throughout the year by them and their child. One parent commented, "I feel my daughter felt more secure starting the year and knowing who her teacher would be. I feel looping is good for young children as it gives them a feeling of stability and the teacher is more able to identify areas the child may need help in." Another parent stated, "I was very happy my child was able to participate in looping. I can easily talk with the teacher about any concerns I have about my child. My child was able to learn more, I think, in such a comfortable and familiar setting as this one." Parents also expressed that, because of looping, they felt

their child's needs were met because the teacher knew each individual so well. A parent commented, "I felt my child was able to get the help he needed because his teacher had him over a two year period." Another parent expressed that strengths and weaknesses were known from the beginning, and the teacher was able to adjust the teaching style used according to student needs. This was able to happen from the first day of school.

Students also had positive things to say about their experience in looping. One child said, "I like looping because I'm not so shy about my teacher and I'm happy about seeing my friends in class." Another student mentioned that on the first day of school he liked knowing everybody's name and he liked that he was familiar with his class members. They expressed their lack of anxiety on the first day of school because they had the same teacher and students in their class. One student wrote, "The first day of school I knew I would have the same teacher, but I was still shy until I found out the students in my class were the same, too." Unlike the parents, the students also had some negative ideas to share. They mentioned things such as, they didn't like having a different classroom or different students in the class. One student said she sometimes got sick of having the same routine as last year. "I didn't like how we had you twice in a row because we had the same stuff and I was getting sick of it."

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on looping, the intervention was a success. Students, parents, and teachers reacted positively to keeping the same group of students and teacher together for two consecutive years. The relationships forged between the teacher, students, and parents resulted in increased academic time at the beginning of the school year. Because the teacher was aware of individual student needs and abilities, appropriate teaching strategies could be implemented immediately. Students did not need to spend learning time developing

everyday classroom routines. The anxiety level of the students was at a minimum because they knew what to expect the first day of school. Parents felt more comfortable discussing with the teacher their child's needs and abilities.

Looping is recommended as an intervention to be used in the elementary setting. Parents should have the opportunity to choose a looping classroom for their child. The emotional and academic benefits of looping make it well worth the teacher's time and effort.

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Appendix A-Parent Letter

June 16, 1999

Dear Parents,

As you know, Mrs. Tollanaar, our second grade teacher at Horace Mann retired this spring. I was recently hired to fill this position. Because of this change, I have the exciting opportunity to be your child's teacher again next year.

The process of a teacher moving from one grade level to another and keeping the same group of students is formally called looping. There are many known benefits of looping. The main benefit being improved academic achievement due to the existing relationship that already exists between teacher and student. I am aware of your child's learning styles, needs, and interests, and we will not have to spend time at the beginning of the year establishing routines, getting to know each other, and learning classroom rules. I feel your child will benefit greatly from being part of a looping classroom.

I am doing an action research project on looping in my graduate class. I will be using a variety of surveys, questionnaires, tests, and observations during the course of the year with you, as well as the students. This data will help to understand and measure the benefits of looping.

I am extremely excited to be one of the first teachers in the district to implement looping and am looking forward to your help and support. If you have any questions or concerns about your child being a part of the looping classroom, please feel free to contact me at home this summer.

Thank you and I'll be in touch again as the summer progresses.

Sincerely,

Jessica Krogmann
243-3890

Appendix B-Parent Volunteer Sheet

Name of parent(s) to volunteer _____

Please circle any that you would be interested and able in helping with and return as soon as possible. Your help is always greatly needed and appreciated.

Center time (Help in the classroom during our center time which is 2:50-3:25 M,T,Th, F. You can choose any or all of the days. This would involve working with small groups of students on specific skills.)

Tutoring (Working individually with students on rote skills like learning wall words, math flashcards, or independent reading. This may involve you doing some simple testing with the student. You can choose the time and day that fits your schedule best)

Cooking at home (I like to incorporate food into the curriculum when I can. I'm not the best cook, so your help is greatly appreciated. I would let you know a few days in advance when this is needed.)

Field Trips (We don't go on many, but it's always better to have plenty of adults to accompany. Again, I would let you know well in advance so you can plan your schedule.)

Weekly Reading (Pulling students out of the classroom individually to read with them. If possible this would need to be a weekly commitment. You can choose the day and time that suits you best.)

Thank you,

Miss Krogmann